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(21) International Application Number: PCT/US00/09612 (22) International Filing Date: 11 April 2000 (11.04.2000) (30) Priority Data: 09/310,355 12 May 1999 (12.05.1999) US (60) Parent Application or Grant SILICON STEMCELL, LLC. [/]; O. SCHENA, Robert, J. [/]; O. ANDERER, Mike [/]; O. RITZ, Peter, B. [/]; O. BENENSTEIN, Mike [/]; O. LAVORGNA, Gregory, J.; O.	Published	
(54) Title: PRINTED MEDIUM ACTIVATED INTERACTIVE COMMUNICATION (54) Titre: COMMUNICATION INTERACTIVE ACTIVEE DE SUPPORT IMPRIME (57) Abstract <p>A scanner (100) is used to scan machine-readable code (10) on an object (50), which may be the universal product code on a vendible product. The data from the machine-readable code is transmitted to a portal server (200), and used to select a supplier of the vendible. Information identifying the supplier may be sent to the user of the scanner, or information identifying the user sent to the supplier. Further arrangements may be made to deliver the vendible to the user's location, or provide the vendible to the user at the supplier's location.</p> (57) Abrégé <p>La présente invention concerne l'utilisation d'un scanner (100) pour la lecture d'un code (10) exploitable par ordinateur sur un objet (50), ce code pouvant être un code universel d'un produit en vente. Les données du code exploitable par ordinateur sont émises vers un serveur portail (200), et utilisées afin de choisir un fournisseur du produit en vente. Une information identifiant le fournisseur peut être envoyée à l'utilisateur du scanner, ou bien une information identifiant l'utilisateur envoyée au fournisseur. Des arrangements additionnels peuvent être mis en oeuvre afin de livrer le produit à l'utilisateur, ou bien de le mettre à disposition de l'utilisateur chez le fournisseur.</p>		

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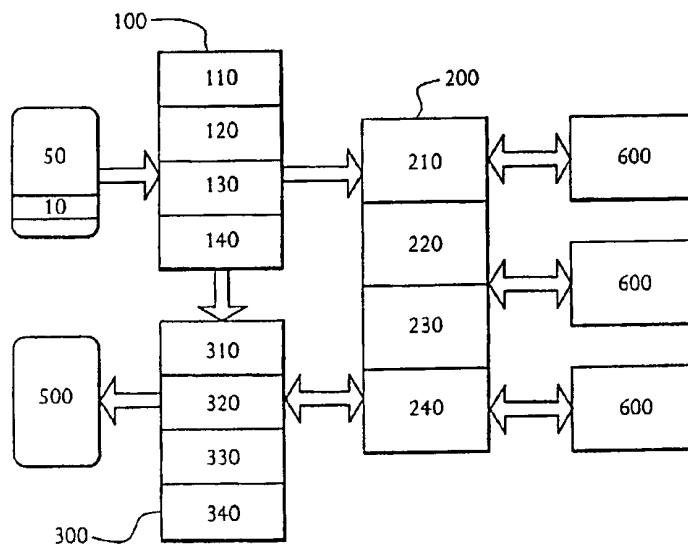
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(54) Title: PRINTED MEDIUM ACTIVATED INTERACTIVE COMMUNICATION



(57) Abstract

A scanner (100) is used to scan machine-readable code (10) on an object (50), which may be the universal product code on a vendible product. The data from the machine-readable code is transmitted to a portal server (200), and used to select a supplier of the vendible. Information identifying the supplier may be sent to the user of the scanner, or information identifying the user sent to the supplier. Further arrangements may be made to deliver the vendible to the user's location, or provide the vendible to the user at the supplier's location.

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Description

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PRINTED MEDIUM ACTIVATED INTERACTIVE COMMUNICATION

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Cross-Reference to Related Applications

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This application is related to U.S. Application Serial Number 09/236,176, filed January 25, 1999 and entitled "PRINTED MEDIUM ACTIVATED INTERACTIVE COMMUNICATION OF MULTIMEDIA INFORMATION, INCLUDING ADVERTISING." and to U.S. Application Serial Number 09/295,823, filed April 21, 1999 and entitled "METHOD FOR MANAGING PRINTED MEDIUM ACTIVATED REVENUE SHARING DOMAIN NAME SYSTEM SCHEMAS".

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Field of the Invention

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The present invention is related to bridging the gap between the virtual multimedia-based Internet world and the physical world of tangible object media. More particularly, the invention relates to systems and methods for communicating information across a network based on initiating a communication from an object containing provider information in the form of a machine-readable code, using a scanner capable of reading the code, a portal server and a receiver connected across a network.

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Background of the Invention

Scanner technology has been used for many years in many contexts. By way of example, scanners are used in supermarkets, with personal computers, and in inventory, manufacturing, and resource control systems. However, scanner technology has not previously been thought of as a means to bridge the gap between static printed media and the "virtual world" of interactivity, which includes the Internet, advertising, entertainment, and electronic commerce.

Printed media have been the primary source of communicating information, including news and advertising information, for centuries. The advent of the Internet over the past few decades has expanded the concept of printed media by making it available in an electronically readable and searchable form and by introducing interactive multi-media capabilities unparalleled by traditional printed media. Unfortunately, many users of printed media do not possess the requisite technical expertise to use the Internet as an efficient source of information. Thus, although almost everyone in the world has access to printed media on a daily basis, only a small percentage of those people possess the requisite technical expertise to use the Internet.

There exists a need for that can link all users of printed media and tangible object media to the "virtual world" and that can deliver desired information to the user without regard to the user's technical expertise. The present invention provides such a method by using scanner technology to bridge the gap between tangible object media, the virtual world of interactivity and the Internet. Moreover, the systems and methods described herein enable those controlling the tangible object media, such as print media, to enhance their presentation of information to their customers by providing them with a multimedia experience unavailable in traditional printed media.

Summary of the Invention

According to one aspect, the present invention comprises a method of communicating news information via a network that connects a scanner, a portal server, and a receiver. The method comprises providing a printed medium containing information including human-readable news information and a machine-readable code containing a link information related to the human-readable news information. The user scans the machine-readable code from the printed medium using the scanner. The scanner stores the machine-readable code in a memory, extracts the link information from the machine readable code in the memory, and may also obtain and store user input information in the memory. The scanner then sends the link information and the user input information to the portal server via the network. The portal server receives the link information and the user input information, selects a multimedia news information sequence corresponding to the link information and the user input information, and sends the multimedia information sequence to the receiver via the network. The receiver receives, stores, and plays the multimedia information sequence.

According to a preferred embodiment, the portal server stores the link information and the user input information. The portal server subsequently identifies newly-available multimedia news information, selects newly-available multimedia news information sequences relevant to the stored news information and user input information, and sends the newly-available multimedia information sequence to the receiver via the network. The receiver then receives, stores, and plays the multimedia information sequence.

According to another aspect, the present invention comprises a method of distributing vendibles, such as goods and services, using a network connecting a scanner, a portal server, and a receiver. An object, which may be a printed medium, containing at least human-readable information and machine-readable codes identifying vendibles is provided. A user scans one of the machine-readable codes containing information identifying a desired vendible using the scanner. The scanner stores the machine-readable code in a memory, and may also obtain and store in the memory a user input information further identifying the desired

5 vendible. The scanner then sends the stored information and information identifying the user to the portal server via the network. The portal server receives the said information, and selects a supplier of a vendible appropriate to the stored
10 information.

5 The supplier may deliver the vendibles to the user, at a location indicated by said information identifying the user. Instead, the portal server may send to the receiver information identifying a location of the supplier, and the user may then
15 go to the location of the supplier. The information identifying the location of the supplier may include not merely an address, but directions from the user's location to the supplier's premises, and even to a particular place within the premises.
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20 The portal server may identify a plurality of possible suppliers, procure information from the suppliers with respect to vendibles supplied by each of them, and selecting one supplier by a process of comparison shopping.

25 If the scanner, is mobile, it is then preferably capable of determining its own current location and reporting that location to the portal server as part of the information identifying the user. The scanner may include a receiver for GPS or other broadcast position signals. The portal server can then select a supplier
30 convenient to the identified location of said scanner.

20 If the suppliers are mobile, the server may determine the current locations of possible suppliers, and compare the current locations of possible suppliers and the user when selecting a supplier.
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40 According to another aspect, the invention comprises a system for communicating information via a telecommunications network by initiating a communication from a printed medium or other object containing scannable
25 provider information. The system comprises telecommunications apparatus including a scanner capable of receiving data by scanning from such an object. The data comprises link information corresponding to the provider information. The
45 scanner comprises a memory capable of storing the link information, and a user interface for receiving user input information, the user input information capable of being stored in the memory. The apparatus is capable of communicating the link
30 information and the user input information via the network and receiving
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5 information via the network. The system also comprises a portal server in
communication with the telecommunications apparatus via the network. The portal
server receives the link information and the user input information, selects an
10 information sequence corresponding to the link information and the user input
5 information, and causes the information sequence to be transmitted via the network
to the telecommunications apparatus.

15 If the telecommunications apparatus comprises a telephone, the portal
server is preferably capable of transmitting information to the telephone in the form
of synthesized speech. Especially preferably, the portal server is capable of
10 communicating with a user by means of synthesized speech replayed by the
20 telephone to the user and user input entered on a keypad of the telephone.

If the telecommunications apparatus includes a facsimile machine for
receiving information from the telecommunications network, the portal server is
25 preferably capable of sending facsimile messages that include codes readable by
15 the said scanner.

30 According to another aspect, the invention provides a method of commercial
administration using a network connecting a scanner, a portal server, and a receiver.
The method comprises generating a written record of a transaction, including
machine-readable code. The code at least identifies the transaction and identifies
35 a database containing records of the transaction and accessible from the network
20 via the portal server. A user scans the machine-readable code using the scanner.
The scanner stores the machine-readable code in a memory, and may also obtain
and store user input information. The scanner then sends the stored information and
40 information identifying the user to the portal server via the network. The portal
25 server receives the information, and permits the user to access the records of the
transaction in the said database.

45 According to another aspect, the invention comprises a method of contact
administration using a network connecting a scanner, a portal server, and a receiver.
A person distributes business cards that identify and provide contact details for the
50 person and include machine-readable code at least identifying the person. A user
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5 who has received such a card scans the machine-readable code using the scanner.
The scanner stores the machine-readable code in a memory, and sends the stored
information and information identifying the user to the portal server via the
10 network. The portal server receives the information, and stores in a database
5 associated with the said person at least the information identifying the said user.
If the contact details of the said person subsequently change, the server notifies at
least some users identified in the said database of the changes.

15 According to another aspect, the invention provides a system for backup of
electronic data, comprising a printer capable of printing data to be backed up in the
10 form of a machine-readable code; and a scanner capable of reading data printed in
the said machine-readable code.

20 According to another aspect, the invention provides a data-handling device
comprising a scanner for reading printed codes, the scanner arranged to scan a laser
beam over the printed code and detect modulation in the intensity of the reflected
25 light; and a projector arranged to project an image by scanning the same laser beam
over a surface while modulating the intensity of the beam.

30 According to another aspect, the invention provides apparatus for selection
of entertainment programs. The apparatus comprises a printed medium containing
entries giving human-readable information on respective available entertainment
20 programs, and each including a machine-readable code; a scanner capable of
scanning the machine readable codes; and apparatus responsive to a scanned code
35 to provide to a user a respective entertainment program.

The apparatus may comprise a portal server connected to the scanner via a
network and a receiver connected to the portal server via the network. The scanner
40 25 is capable of transmitting scanned code to the portal server, and the portal server
is responsive to the transmitted scan to transmit the appropriate entertainment
program to the receiver, or to transmit to said receiver information enabling said
45 receiver to show said entertainment program to a user.

30 The portal server can preferably cause the user to be charged any applicable
“pay-per-view” fee for viewing a program.

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Brief Description of the Drawings

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Figure 1 depicts an embodiment of a system performing a method of the present invention using a receiver to communicate with both a scanner and a portal server.

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Figure 2 depicts an embodiment of a system performing a method of the present invention wherein the scanner communicates with a portal server directly without a receiver.

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Figure 3 depicts an embodiment of a system performing a method of the present invention wherein the scanner and the customer premises equipment are integrated into one device.

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Figure 4 depicts an embodiment of a system performing a method of the present invention wherein the a customer premises equipment is separate from the receiver and the scanner.

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Detailed Description of the Invention

Figure 1 depicts an embodiment of a system performing a method of the present invention including three components: a scanner 100, a receiver 180, and a portal server 200. In one embodiment, the scanner 100 and the receiver 180 comprise into a single device. In another embodiment, the scanner 100 communicates with the portal server 200 directly, and a customer premises equipment ("CPE") 300, serving as the receiver 180, plays multimedia sequence information received from the portal server 200.

The scanner 100 may be a handheld device, preferably, but not necessarily, wireless. The scanner 100 may be, for example, an enhanced existing electronic device, a TV remote control, a mouse, a telephone, a cell phone, a PC card device, a palmtop, a calculator, a key chain, a pen, an identification card, a smart card, a hand held GPS (Global Positioning System) device, a desktop or laptop computer, a digital appliance, a microprocessor-based device, a personal digital assistant, a pager or a two-way pager. Especially when the scanner 100 and the receiver 180 are combined in a single small portable device, such as a pager or even a cell phone, it is difficult to provide a practical alphabetic keyboard. It is therefore a major advantage of the present invention when the machine-readable code 10 contains sufficient information that any subsequent interaction between the user and the server 200 can be conducted either with limited choice menus or by scanning further machine-readable codes 10. The problem of providing a practical keyboard on a small device can then be solved by rendering a full keyboard unnecessary.

Some processing is typically necessary to convert the code 10 into a form that can be transmitted to a portal server 200, so if the scanner 100 is a dumb device such as a mouse it is preferably connected directly to a receiver 180 having significant data-processing capacity.

The scanner 100 is capable of reading data such as non-coded data and machine-readable code 10 from a printed medium or other object 50. The machine-readable code 10 may be a barcode, an enhanced barcode, a new enhanced code, or any type of code, including dynamic codes and high density barcodes.

5 In one embodiment, the code 10 contains a link information corresponding to a provider information from the printed medium 50. The link information may correspond to any of a universal resource locator ("URL"), an Internet address
10 information, a telephone number, network address information, a trademark information, a source of origin, an organization name, a product name, a service name, a benefit redemption information, a provider defined information, a user personal profile information (*i.e.*, "a cookie"), a user interest information, a server command information, and a customer premises equipment preference information.

15 If the printed medium is a printout of a page from the World Wide Web, then the code 10 may be generated by an electronic watermark that appears only
20 when the page is printed out, and does not obtrude when the page is viewed on-line. The watermark may then be a fixed reference, or may be generated dynamically when the page is downloaded.

25 The link information may be an alphanumeric sequence printed in form of the machine-readable code 10. The alphanumeric sequence may be assigned to the printed medium 50 by the provider 600 and may be encoded according to the provider's preference. The alphanumeric sequence may activate and result in the
30 playing of the multimedia sequence information 500. For example, a machine-readable code 10 on the printed advertisement for an automobile may translate into the following alphanumeric sequence "A001B0990799A5557ZQZ6898". The
35 "A001" designation may correspond to a template on the scanner 100 enabling Ford to present a person with a user input information asking whether the person is interested in advertisements, transactions, or both. The "B099" designation may refer to a type and name of the magazine which carried the ad. The "0799"
40 designation may refer to July 1999 issue from advertiser A5557 which might be a local automobile dealer. The "ZQZ6898" designation may be the network code and could refer to a network address at the portal server 200 or to a link table. Existing
45 UPC or ISBN numbers may serve as the alphanumeric sequence. At least one of the scanner 100, the receiver 180, or the portal server 200, may extract the provider
50 information from such alphanumeric sequence and translate it into a network address at the portal server 200 or a link table.

5 In one embodiment, the printed medium 50 is a news periodical, and a printed code 10 is provided at the end of each individual news article (not shown). The code then prompts the portal server 200 to supply an on-line version of the original article, an update of the original article, or a multimedia sequence
10 containing more information on the news event that was the subject of the original printed article. Instead, or in addition, the portal server 200 may send to the receiver 180 an interactive prompt offering options to request further information, hyperlinks to information on related topics, or future updates of the news item. Any
15 such request for future updates may be tied to a user personal profile, and/or to a profile for a particular receiver 180. The receiver profile determines both the format of the updates and the manner of notifying new updates to the user.

According to an embodiment of the invention, if the connection from the scanner 100 to the portal server 200 is not suitable for immediate transmission, then
25 the scanner 100 or an intermediate device stores and queues scans and sends them in a batch when the connection is available, or when the number of queued scans is sufficient to justify a transmission overhead, or when instructed by the user. Instead, or in addition, further information to be sent from the portal server 200 to
30 the receiver 180 or customer premises equipment 300 can be queued either at the server or at an intermediate device. For example, when the scanner 100 and/or the receiver 180 is a pager, the different natures of the connections from the pager to the paging service (not shown) and from the paging service to the portal server 200
35 may make it expedient to queue either scans or downloads at the paging service. Also, if the user has requested later updates of information downloaded, the portal server 200 can actively send updates, or notifications of updates, for example, to
40 a pager or e-mail receiver, and can retain updates until the user's receiver 180 next establishes contact with the server, where the receiver 180 is not continuously accessible.

45 The code 10 comprises at least one of the link information, and a publication information (*i.e.*, where the information was published or located), along with a demographic and other advertising or message-specific information
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5 provided by a provider 600. The code 10 may also comprise personal and provider security information.

10 A method of the invention includes using the system to collect and manage code 10 that lacks link information. This linkless code information may be added
5 to the cookie along with any additional user input information. The code 10 is capable of being read by a scanner 100 or a transducer generating and transmitting the link information based upon a stimulus. The scanner 100 or transducer is
15 capable of differentiating between information and data contained within code 10. One type of the code 10 may be an information-only type that would link to an information page. A simple example of this would be a scanned universal product
20 code ("UPC") printed on a can of food linking a person using the system to the manufacturer's information on nutrition, recipe, or transaction information. The system can also process UPC codes by directing them to a link table to resolve the link without any added codes. The system is capable of processing the ISBN
25 number codes, UPC codes and any codes currently in use.

30 More complex interactive codes could be routed based on any of the scanned information in combination with a cookie, user interactive responses from the user input information, the person's location or other demographic information and a portal server database 210 information. The cookie comprises a person's
20 identifying information such as name, address, credit card(s) information, and other related information. Cookies may be stored on the scanner 100, the receiver 180, or the portal server 200. Other information that may be combined with the code 10 includes executable code downloaded from the portal server 200 or provider 600,
35 and user input information that could further supplement the scanned information from code 10 by eliciting an interactive response from the person using the system.

40 The user personal profile information supplied depends on the nature of the scan. If all that the user is requesting is freely-available information from web
45 pages, for example, then no more personal information is required than a network delivery address for the web pages being downloaded. Even then, however, the supplier of the information may wish for more information, for example, of a
30 demographic nature. If the user is requesting access to personal or confidential

5 information, or to information for which a fee is payable, or is initiating a commercial transaction, then proper identification is needed. According to an
10 embodiment of the invention, the user enters a PIN number or other identifying data, for example, from a keypad if the scanner 100 or the receiver 180 includes
5 one. According to another embodiment, the scanner 100 is equipped with a biometric device, for example, a fingerprint scanner. According to another
15 embodiment, the scanner 100 and/or the receiver 180 has identifying data embedded or programmed into it, or the network address of the user is identified to the portal server 200. A single device may incorporate features of more than one
10 of those embodiments.

20 If personal details must be sent over an insecure public network, for example, over the internet or over a cell phone network, then the system preferably includes provision for encrypting the data before transmission. According to one
25 embodiment, a Crypt-all card generates encrypted data and displays it in the form of a machine-readable code 10 that can then be scanned and sent without further encryption.

30 One exemplary code corresponds to reordering information such that a reordering of a product may be activated by scanning the code 10, recognizing it as a reorder, and maintaining a transaction via the portal server 200 such that a
20 percentage of a fee for the reorder is maintained by a fee tracking module 220. In one embodiment, the fee is shared with the person placing the transaction. In
35 another example, an HMO pharmacy could encode patient information, medication information, and refill information onto a printed label of medication upon its dispensing. The information would be represented by code 10. Scanner 100 would
40 25 read the code 10 and validate the personal information contained in the code 10 against the user personal profile information stored on either the scanner 100, the receiver 180, the portal server 200, or a provider 600. Once the validation is
45 complete, the system allows for secure transactions to proceed, including authenticated refills, recording the transaction and maintaining an accounting of a
30 percentage of a fee for the refill using the tracking module 220.

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5 A method of the present invention contemplates using additional code types
such as phone numbers, business card, service information, benefit redemption
information, rebate, coupon, literature, or any general information category of
10 interest to a person or information provider 600. The information contained in the
5 additional code types may be uploaded to the scanner 100, receiver 180, or portal
server 200 once or sent locally or with cookie and security information from
15 anywhere in the network. The processing of codes 10, including additional code
types, may optionally but not necessarily be done at a time different from reading
and scanning the printed medium 50. In a preferred embodiment, the scanner 100
10 generates and stores a code file in memory 110 representing a collection of codes
20 scanned by the operator in any given time period. The scanner 100 uploads the
coded file in memory 110 to the receiver 180 according to a user initiated stimulus.
For example, a user may find four advertisements of interest in a printed medium
25 50, such as a magazine. The scanner 100 could read the four codes 10 from the
15 magazine advertisements and store them in the memory 110. Subsequently, at a
time convenient to the user, the user can upload the information to the receiver 180
for processing.

30 The information in the code 10 could be simple data or complex data-type-
plus data, such as encoded, printed multimedia information. A UPC code is an
20 example of simple data. The information used by the system can also be non-coded
or raw. For example, a URL is non-coded data, but when encoded as a URL-type
35 code 10, the information in the code 10 may be processed.

40 A method of the invention uses unique code templates for interactivity
which contain transaction information, authorization information, references to the
25 publisher, media originator, ad placement, date of publication, dealer, reseller or
distributor. The system is capable of tracking the scans according to the code types
used in scanning these ads and collecting the demographics. A method of the
45 invention may also include the steps of tracking and redirecting the usage of the
codes 10 by different information providers 600 based on the content of the printed
30 information. For example, a person scans an identifying code 10 related to a brand
of computer. The computer manufacturer would like to direct the person to its

5 information site. However, the person who performed the scan or portal server 200
that processed the scan, may choose to auction off the instance of the scan to a
competitor, thereby allowing the competitor to bid for the right to transmit more
10 information to the person about the competitor's comparable product or a
5 transaction, such as user interest information.

Another method of the invention includes communicating with digital
copyright databases bearing the code in tangible format. For example, an article
15 that includes the code 10 may direct a person wanting to copy the article to the
copyright database. The method may include the steps of charging the person a
10 fee and suggesting related articles based on the information in the code 10. The
20 method may also include the steps of monitoring the commercial, office, and
copying equipment connected to the network that processes the code, and then
activating the access to the copyrighted materials database. In that context, the
25 code serves as an intelligent watermark capable of carrying the article identifying
15 information, distribution information, and fee related information.

Preferably, the code 10 features a small footprint, an attractive appearance,
a high density of information, and ease of scanning. For example the footprint
30 may be a triangle shaped code with a logo and an indicator of what type of code 10
it is (information, e-commerce, or both). The identifying characteristics of the
20 presentation of the code 10 signify that the code is not an ordinary advertisement,
35 but part of an enhanced information medium leading to multiple dimensions of
multimedia information sequences 500.

The scanner 100 can transmit the code 10 to a receiver 180, such as a
television, a set top box, a computer, a cell telephone, a remote control, a personal
40 digital assistant, an integrated PC-TV device (e.g., Web TV), a pager or two-way
25 pager, or directly to the portal server 200. The receiver 180 is in communication
with a network, such as the Internet or other network, and can direct or link a
45 person to a specific network address or site based on the machine-readable code or
codes 10 contained in the scanned information from the printed medium 50.

30 For example, the provider information depicted on a printed medium 50
50 may be advertising information for an automobile. The manufacturer of the

5 automobile would be provider 600. The link information in code 10 from the
printed advertisement may include network address information, such as for
example the manufacturer's web site. Processing the link information may result
10 in playing a multimedia information sequence 500 on the receiver 180 provided by
5 provider 600. Additionally or in the alternative, the network address information
may point to a file containing executable computer code which could be
downloaded or executed remotely then displayed on the receiver 180 or scanner
15 100. One or more link table(s) (not shown) may also be used to facilitate a two-
way communication between the provider 600 and receiver 180. A link table
20 containing network codes and associated network address information, for example,
may be accessed to process link information containing only the network code.
The link table associates the network code to a network address information to
facilitate the connection between provider 600 and receiver 180. Link information
25 may also be cascaded via the link table(s). Link tables may be located on or be
15 accessible to the receiver 180, the portal server 200, or the provider 600. The
machine-readable code 10 can also link the person directly to a specific Internet
address without accessing a link table.

30 In a preferred embodiment of a system executing a method of the invention,
the scanner 100 includes a memory 110, a user interface 120, and a
20 communications bridge 130.

35 The user interface 120 obtains user input information, such as an advertising
authorization, a transaction authorization, a user personal profile information, and
a user interest information corresponding to the provider information. The user
input information may be received and stored in the scanner memory 110, the
40 25 receiver 180, or the portal server 200. The scanner 100 routes the link information
and the user input information based upon a user request via the user interface 120.
The user interface 120 may be, for example, a voice-activated system, a keypad, or
45 a keyboard. In one embodiment, the user interface 120 may reside on any one or
more of the scanner 100, the receiver 180, such as a customer premises equipment
30 ("CPE") 300 for displaying the multimedia sequence information 500, or the portal
server 200.

5 The communications bridge 130 sends the link information and the user input information to the receiver 180 and, via the network, to the portal server 200. An infrared communications system, a mobile radio communications system, or an
10 IP-based communications system are exemplary of the communications bridge.

5 The scanner 100 comprises a handheld component in a preferred embodiment. The handheld component may comprise an enhanced existing device like a TV remote control, a mouse, a cell phone, a REX device, a palmtop, a
15 calculator, a key chain, a pen, an identification card, a smart card, a hand held global positioning system ("GPS") device, a desktop or laptop computer or
10 virtually any other digital appliance or a microprocessor based device. The scanner 100 could be a proximity-based device that would activate a smart button, which is a device having a memory and a communicator to upload the information in the
20 memory to a network, or a contact-based device. For example, scanner 100 may be either an optical scanner or a transducer, respectively. The scanner 100 may
25 have several modes, such as scan and process, scan and hold, and scan and display. The scanner 100 may also have a mode allowing copying of the code 10 for backup or review and edit. The scanner 100 may also have a light and/or a sound indicator
30 for confirming that a valid scan occurred. The scanner 100 may also have transmit and receive indicators for confirming that a valid scan occurred. Optionally, the
20 scanner 100 could communicate with another scanner 100 to exchange link, code, or cookie information.
35

 Where the scanner is combined with a GPS device, or other device capable of determining its own location, then that location may be included in the user input information sent to the portal server 200, and may be taken into account by the
40 portal server in selecting the information to be sent to the receiver 180. If the scanner and receiver are installed in a vehicle, then information from a vehicle navigation system may be used. If the scanner 100 and receiver 180, 300 are
45 comparatively immobile, for example, a desktop computer or a domestic television set, then location information may be programmed into the scanner 100, or may be
30 stored in the portal server 200.

5 If the transmitted scan conveys an enquiry about, for example, the purchase
of vendible items such as goods or services, the portal server may supply
information about suppliers near to the indicated location of the scanner, and that
10 information may include directions for the user to reach the supplier's location.
5 Such directions could potentially identify even the location of the item on the
shelves. The system can also supply the user with information, such as prices,
15 discounts, and special offers, that is specific to the individual supermarket. If there
is more than one reasonable supplier, the server may comparison shop, or may
auction the enquiry, or may offer the user the choice of suppliers.

10 If the scanner 100 and receiver 180 are mobile, and the scanner provides
location information, then the possibilities for customized information are almost
20 limitless. If a user scans a UPC on a product, and the location of the user is
recognized as that of a particular supermarket, say, then the portal server can return
25 to the user. Alternatively, information might be provided about competing suppliers
15 in the immediate vicinity.

Instead, the system could order vendibles to be delivered to the user's
location. For example, the system could select the nearest cooked food delivery
30 service, or the nearest one that supplied a particular sort of pizza, and generate an
order, with at most a confirming telephone call or e-mail message. Where the
20 required product is not locally available, the system can not only locate a supplier,
35 comparison-shopping price and availability as appropriate, but also identify the
quickest, cheapest, or most reliable method of delivery to the user's location.

Where suppliers are mobile, for example, in some sorts of health care,
40 emergency repair services, or other service industries where the supplier visits the
25 user's location, the system could also track the movements of supplier units. In one
embodiment, a member of supplier personnel uses a scanner 10 to send information
on work done to a portal server 200, the scanner sends information including the
45 location of the supplier unit, and that information is used to match user requests to
particular mobile supplier units in accordance with optimization criteria.

30 In one embodiment, the system comprises a shopping comparator module
50 in communication with one or more of the scanner 100, the receiver 180, and the

portal server 200. The shopping comparator module is capable of operating or communicating with comparison shopping services and obtaining vendor information based on the link information, including the price information, in a comparative manner. The shopping comparator module is further capable of operating an auction for at least one of the features of link information. An example comprises using system with the shopping comparator module to obtain a best price for a prescription.

Figure 3 depicts the scanner 100 as part of an integrated dedicated unit 400 which includes a memory 420, a microprocessor (not shown), stored templates containing the link and cookie information (not shown), a display 430, a cable (not shown), and a wireless transmitting device 440, such as infrared, visual or radio frequency. The dedicated unit 400 could contain any subset of these components or include other components as depicted in Figures 2 and 4.

A method of the invention includes the steps of scanning encoded information from the embedded codes 10 and uploading these codes to the portal server 200 for immediate or delayed processing or for reference. A method may also include allowing print advertisers to track their impressions to execution and to collect demographic information about the person performing the scan through a tracking module 220. The tracking module 220 is illustrated in figure 1 as part of the portal server 200. However, it may reside in any of the 100, 180, 400, 300, 200, or 600 components of the system. The tracking module 220 is further capable of tracking the transaction value of e-commerce transactions originating from a specific publication, type of publication, or provider 600 and calculate fee percentages based on the transaction. For example, the scanner 100 may comprise a clock capable of tracking the time the ad was scanned. In an embodiment where scanner 100 is a GPS, the geographical location where the scan occurred may also be tracked. A method of the invention also contemplates transmitting bio-metric information according and to the extent permitted by the user personal profile information. The combination of all tracking information comprises ad read-scan context information which may be transmitted to the portal server 200 or to the

5 provider 600 according to and to the extent permitted by the user personal profile information.

10 The receiver 180 is in communication with the scanner 100 and portal server 200 via wire, or through wireless technology such as infrared, light based
5 transmission, radio frequency, or satellite. The receiver 180 could be incorporated into or be a computer, a cell phone, a facsimile machine, a pager, a remote control, a personal digital assistant, a simple buffer, or use a direct link. The receiver 180
15 could also be incorporated into existing devices such as a television, a set top box, a Web TV device, a VCR, a Digital Versatile Disc ("DVD") player, an appliance, a customer premises equipment ("CPE") 300, or any other electronic device. The
20 receiver 180 may, but not necessarily, collect, sort and prioritize the transmissions of link and user input information. The receiver 180 could queue up these transmissions or process them immediately. The receiver 180 could also contain
25 at least one cookie, and received time information, as well as other information including receiver or provider specific information.

30 In one embodiment of a system performing a method of the invention, the receiver 180 forwards the raw scanned codes 10 directly to the portal server 200 or other site such as a provider 600 via a portal server 200. In another embodiment, the receiver 180 collects, stores, processes, and forwards the scanned code
20 information along with the cookie and other state dependant information, such as time, temperature, and location, to the network.

35 The receiver 180 may be multi-functional and include multiple inputs such as radio frequency and infrared. The receiver 180 may also incorporate X-10, wireless, wired, and power-line networking to link to multiple units or, for larger
40 installations, at least one repeater. The receiver 180 may also incorporate wireless, wire-line, or power-line links to at least one local computer or CPE 300.

45 In embodiments shown in Figures 2 and 4, the CPE 300 may function as a queue processor or pre-processor. Also a user may enter information using the CPE 300, including user personal profile information. In another embodiment,
30 scanned codes 10 are processed by the CPE 300 according to user preferences. By way of example, the CPE 300 could process the codes 10 automatically and

5 sequentially as the codes 10 are received, or store the codes 10 in a queue to be
processed at the convenience of the user. Cookies may be stored on one or more
of the CPE 300, the scanner 100, and the receiver 180. The CPE 300 receives the
10 scanned code 10, including the link information from scanner 100, and transmits
5 the code 10 to the portal server 200. The portal server 200 resolves the link
information and sets up a path from a location on the network, such as a specific
web address, Internet site, or provider 600 location, to the receiver 180. The
15 location sends information, such as multimedia information sequences 500, along
the path to the receiver 180 for display and playback.

10 A system for performing a method of the present invention contemplates at
least one portal server 200. The portal server 200 may be a single site or multiple
sites. The portal server 200 is in communication with the scanner 100 and the
receiver 180 via the network and centrally manages, assigns, and controls the codes
20 10, code types and information from the printed media 50. The portal server 200
25 is capable of receiving the link information and the user input information,
selecting a multimedia information sequence 500 corresponding to the link
information and the user input information, and sending the multimedia
30 information sequence 500 via the network to the receiver 180.

One embodiment of the portal server 200 is capable of maintaining a
20 scanner abstraction layer, with published API's. It then becomes possible for
providers to write modular applications that interface with the incoming data from
scanners 100 at the published interface. Each module registers with the server
system an interest in processing particular sorts of scans. The system assesses
35 incoming scan data, and relays it to one or more modules according to the interests
40 registered. The scan data may contain a portion of data intelligible only to the
appropriate modules, provided that that portion of data is packaged so that the
system does not need to understand it, and provided that the standard part of the
45 scan data contains sufficient information to ensure that the data reaches only the
correct modules.

30 Modules may function for information gathering, requests, transmission,
logging, and other tracking and transaction oriented functions. The common system
50

5 monitors the activity of the various modules, and apportions costs and revenues to
the providers. Such an open, modular structure is believed to be especially
10 advantageous, because specialized modules, and modules for new functionality, are
written more readily and more quickly under free-market conditions.

5 One advantage of the method of the invention is the minimal amount of
information needed to be scanned to link to a specific location when using a link
15 information database including cookies at the portal server 200. The portal server
200 processes code 10 which may contain levels of embedded information, and
references information, such as database information provided by providers 600,
10 advertisers, and information providers. The information contained in scanned code
20 10 may be combined with at least one of the user input information, the cookie,
state dependant information, ad read-scan context information and other transmitted
information to link the portal server 200 to at least one location on the network and
25 complete a transaction, such as a request for information or an e-commerce
15 transaction.

In one embodiment of a system performing a method of the invention, the
30 portal server 200 is adapted to receive and process requests from a user who
provides the portal server 200 with raw code 10 through a communications device
such as a keyboard, a telephone, a voice activated system, or a modem. In this
20 embodiment, a user can initiate the interactive communication of multimedia
35 information without using scanner 100. In a further embodiment, the scanner 100
may access the portal server via a telephone dial system. For example, after
scanning, a user may use a telephone to communicate the scanner 100 to the
40 network. The scanner 100 may then be a simple light-pen, connected to the
25 telephone through circuitry transparent to the user. The system can then be used by
persons with no experience of using, or desire to use, a computer or other
information technology devices.

45 Once data has been transferred, the user may use a voice menu system to
control the remainder of the transaction, such as the receipt of sound only
30 information, or engaging in a transaction. Instead of, or in addition to, the voice
50 menu system, the user could be connected to a call center with human operatives.

5 who would be have displayed all of the information from the original scan. A certain amount of user identification information could also be automatically supplied to the operatives.

10 In another embodiment, the receiver is a facsimile machine, and can receive data from the server in the form of computer-generated fax images. The fax images could include machine readable codes 10, which could be scanned by the user to supply or request further information. A dialog between the user and the portal server could then be conducted entirely by facsimile and light pen.

15 In another embodiment, the portal server 200 has a single common database of links for print and electronic transactions. The database of links may be accessed by users of the system, such as advertisers, print media owners, and information providers 600.

20 A tracking module 220 in the portal server 200 can track link information corresponding to a user, such as a universal resource locator, an Internet address information, a trademark information, a source of origin, an organization name, a product name, a service name, a benefit redemption information, a provider defined information, a user personal profile information, a user interest information, a server command information, and a customer premises equipment preference information.

25 The tracking module 220 is also capable of tracking fees associated with every ad and every transaction originating on the network via the portal server 200. Fees may be based on, for example, the selected multimedia information sequence, the number and frequency of the link information received by the portal server corresponding to a particular information provider, or the transaction value in the event the selected multimedia information sequence generates a transaction. The fee tracking module 220 can track fees relating to at least one e-commerce transaction originating from the scan.

30 A provider management module 230 and a statistics module 240 in the portal server 200 maintain advertising information and transactions generated from the providers 600 that originate independent of a scan based on user personal profile information. Thus, the invention allows advertisers to broadcast to users of

5 the portal server 200 according to the user personal profile information or portal
server configuration. The provider management module 230 is capable of providing
10 feed back to the providers regarding the effectiveness of the provider's printed
media 50, and allows for flexible, real-time message tuning.

5 An individual demographics ("indigraphics") module (not shown) in the
portal server 200 performs user personal profile information management
15 functions, such as marking and publishing auction oriented information based on
the user personal profile and interest information. The user personal profile
information can also be used to modify the selection of information that is supplied
10 in response to subsequent user scans.

20 A funds management module (not shown) in the portal server 200 manages
and facilitates fund transactions between users of the system. The funds
management module processes information from the other modules in the portal
25 server 200, such as the tracking module 220. Preferably, the funds management
15 module uses a form of electronic funds transfer, such as Ecash, to accept and
distribute funds according to information received from the tracking module 220.

30 For example, in a system capable of performing a method of the invention,
a person can scan an ordinary black and white automobile advertisement placed in
a newspaper by a local dealer that is enhanced with code 10. Shortly thereafter, the
20 person experiences a full-featured multimedia presentation related to the
advertisement on the person's Web TV or computer. The indigraphics module
35 enables the presentation to be tailored to the individual viewer. As is possible with
any of the information sequences produced by the methods and systems of the
present invention, the server 200 maintains a plethora of links to different stored
40 multimedia display elements, and creates the presentation in real time by selecting
25 and combining elements in accordance with the scanned-in enquiry and the user's
individual demographics. The portal server 200 may either transmit the completed
45 presentation to the receiver 180 or, if the receiver is sufficiently powerful, may
merely transmit the sequence of links from which the receiver can call down and
30 assemble the elements of the presentation.

5 The tracking module 220 calculates a fee to be shared between the
manufacturer, the dealer, and the person buying the car based on a percentage of
10 the sale. The funds management module can accept Ecash from the person and
either distribute it to all parties involved in the transaction or store the information
5 as debits and credits in an account database.

15 In another example, a person can go to the grocery store and scan UPC
codes 10 off items and check the nutrition information or recipes at the end of the
aisle in a kiosk with or without a printer. Alternatively, the person can take the
UPC information home and upload it to their receiver 180 or a CPE, and get
10 information on the product, a coupon, or other benefit redemption information.
20 The store could optionally provide a link to the net so the user could upload the
information to his home computer from the store via the Internet connection.

25 In another example, stuffed animals could be linked to a location on the
network by using a scanner 100. The scanner 100, according to this example can
15 be a proximity-based device, such as a smart button (like those in Java rings), or
almost any other kind of device including security cards and access devices.

30 In another example, a person can scan a 5 year old computer monitor on the
person's desk and be immediately routed to a web page that offers a list of local
service centers for the monitor or technical information about the monitor, such as
20 schematics, instruction manuals, or warranty manuals. The transaction could also
35 result in the person receiving a rebate offer, a trade-in offer, or recall and safety
information. The invention enables manufacturers to maintain contact with
customers for extended periods of time beyond the traditional period of time
40 manufacturers and customers interact. The contact enables the manufacturer to
25 collect product usage information that was traditionally inaccessible.
Manufacturers could also use incentive programs to get people to scan their
products.

45 The invention provides a method for allowing the information providers 600
to electronically receive codes 10 to embed in the advertisements. It also allows
30 the publishers of the advertisements, such as newspaper and magazine companies,
50 to print their own ad codes and share this information with the portal server 200.

5 The invention contemplates using an enhanced code in the ads containing
information on the identity of the publication and the product and enables the
publishers of the ads to share in the flow-through profits of a transaction even
10 though they may not provide any products. The invention further enables simple
5 marketers and catalogue providers to operate with reduced infrastructure by
including information in the code 10 which points to portal-operated e-commerce
15 stores or to the manufacturer/distributor's e-commerce store. The method also
enables advertisers to record the level of response to different advertisements, both
in terms of enquiries generated and in terms of e-sales generated. The advertiser
10 can thus measure directly the effectiveness of different advertisements in different
20 printed media.

Reprints of copyrighted material could also be a service the portal server
200 provides to authors. Authors may embed a code 10 in their book or article. A
25 user scanning the code 10 could receive a copy of the entire article or related
15 articles or books or information for an appropriate fee. The invention provides
authors with an inexpensive method for collecting fees that are typically very
small. A copyright service portal server could credit the author's account by
30 pennies or even fractions of pennies per downloaded page via an existing e-
commerce service or another portal server. Fees associated with accessing and
20 downloading moderately and expensively priced items, such as CDs and
35 newsletters, can be handled in a similar fashion.

The invention further contemplates setting up medical testing devices to
operate with the system. A body monitor capable of tracking medical information
40 regarding the person's then existing medical condition could communicate this
25 information periodically or when a parameter is so indicated or satisfied. The
system of the invention features the ability to combine wired and wireless raw data
with user input, state information, and cookie information, at the portal server 200.
45 The portal server 200 directs and channels the information based on the user
personal profile information. The base information could be a code that is scanned
30 or is embedded in a device that adds the base information to information collected
50 by the body monitor. The link at the portal server 200 may be dynamically moved

5 and a new version of the body monitor's embedded code or a new set of parameters may be downloaded from a location on the network.

10 The invention also contemplates using the system to collect alarm and appliance information from household items. The system includes a central
5 receiver capable of receiving radio frequency or infrared signals. A raw data stream, pointer information, and state information may be transmitted from the household item to the receiver. The receiver communicates the information to the
15 portal server. The portal server can combine the information with a cookie and use the pointer information to securely send it to the manufacturer's web site.

10 The invention contemplates using the system for a wide variety of purposes. For example, parents and a school could use codes 10 and scanners 100 to monitor the arrival and departure of children, or parents could scan a child's report card to confirm that they had read it. A fitness club could provide placards with bar codes
20 on them for users to scan to record their weight, exercises completed, and so on. Once the data was uploaded, an application module on the server could recognize the data, generate any desired form of report, and return it to a receiver 180
25 comprising a printer for printing out. The system could be used for stock control. Every time the user uses an item, he or she scans the UPC code. A module on the server 200 can then log the consumption of items from stock, which might be items
30 in a factory, a shop, or even groceries in the user's kitchen at home, generate orders for replenishment of items that are running short, and even identify patterns and predict when replenishment of particular items will be needed.

35 The system executing a method of the invention may have several modes of operation, including collect and store, collect and execute, and collect and
40 process then execute. The user sets the mode according to the user personal profile information. The user interface of the scanner, settings on the receiver and software settings on the CPE 300 or the portal server 200 may also be combined with the
45 user personal profile information to set the mode.

Existing remote control devices such as television remote controls can be
30 modified to scan and transmit the code 10 to a receiver 180 such as a set top box. In one embodiment, the code 10 would be scanned and embedded after a specific
50

5 sequence of standard codes that could be stripped out by the receiver 180. For
example, in collect and store mode, pressing a predetermined sequence of buttons
on a remote control will activate the scan mode of the remote. Once activated, the
10 remote control can be used to collect and store a code 10 from a magazine
advertisement, for example. The user would then point the remote at the set top
5 box and depress a single key or sequence of keys to transmit the code information.

15 Information such as multi-media information sequences 500, may be
transmitted to a CPE 300, or any other receiver 180 connected to the network. The
receiver 180 and a local CPE 300 could be combined into a single unit. The
10 receiver 180 could be a dumb or smart device, embedded or stand alone. The CPE
20 could be a PC or could be omitted or replaced by online processing or by a Web
TV. The receiver 180 and scanner 100 of the invention can be combined and
included as part of an enhanced WebTV.

25 In one embodiment of the invention, a machine-readable code 10 contains
15 not merely a link to or identification of a source of information on a network but
the actual text of a document. For example, a document sent by facsimile may
contain either a machine-readable code 10 providing a link to a machine-readable
30 version of the faxed message, or an actual copy of the text in high-density machine-
readable code so that a scanner 100 can read it. For another example, a printed
20 publication could contain its own text in high-density machine readable code 10.
Thus, in either case, the document can be provided in word-processor format for
35 further editing, without the need for a direct computer-to-computer connection.
Alternatively, the entire text of a document could be printed in a space too small
40 to contain it in normal print, and scanned into a scanner 100 and receiver 180. The
25 scanner 100 then need only have sufficient memory to store the scanned document,
and some means of displaying it. Even a scanner incorporated in a pager could be
used. In accordance with this embodiment of the invention, it is possible to print
45 a resume on the back of a business card, or to have a medical card that bears a
complete medical history.

30 This embodiment is especially advantageous for backing up of data. It is
50 merely necessary to connect a device 100, 180, 300 to a printer (not shown) and to

5 print out the contents in high-density machine readable code. Connecting the device
to the printer by means of an infra-red or radio link is especially preferred. The
code may be either a straight dump of the memory content of the device being
10 backed up, or a higher-level code that is not machine-specific. A code 10 that is
5 not machine specific may also be used to transfer data from one device to another,
when a direct electronic link is unavailable or inconvenient. For example, an
address book telephone list could be printed out from a computer contact manager,
15 and the entire list, or a particular number that the user wishes to dial, scanned into
a telephone equipped with a scanner 100.

10 A portal server 200 could also update information on a device to which it
is not directly connected by sending a machine-readable code 10 to a printer from
20 which the printed code is sent to the scanner of the device that is to be updated.

The system is further capable of printing a machine readable code 10 which
25 may update calendar or schedule information on a customer's PIM or contacts,
15 where the PIM is equipped with a scanner 100. The machine-readable code 10 may
either be a high density code containing the actual schedule information being sent,
or a link information, including a pointer, to a link table or a page containing the
30 necessary update file. This system comprises a different way of hot loading a PIM
with current information. It also bypasses docking and other physical connections.
20 and the machine-readable code 10 could be faxed or copied.

35 Another embodiment of the invention is be used with television and movie
program guides and catalogs. The guide includes machine-readable codes 10 that
give scheduling information. The user selects a program or a film, and scans the
associated code. The system then programs the video recorder, generates a pay-
40 per-view order, sets the television set to the correct channel, or takes whatever other
25 action is required. The processing may be assigned to the scanner, the portal server,
or the receiver as is appropriate in a particular case. This embodiment has the
advantage that, if the need for keypad input can be eliminated, the size of a
45 television or VCR remote control unit can be considerably reduced. The codes used
30 may correspond to the existing VCR Plus codes, or may contain additional
information, such as information about the content of programs.
50

5 The system may further comprise a digital content distribution module in
communication with the scanner 100. The scanner 100 may be in communication
with an MP3 player device (e.g. RIO) or a similar digital content player device (not
10 shown), including an MPEG2 video content player. The digital content distribution
5 module may be activated with a scan of a machine-readable code 10 in an
advertisement or similar printed medium, so that the scan causes downloading of
15 the complete video file or just a sample clip.

 According to another embodiment of the invention, printed receipts,
invoices, statements, and other records of transactions include a machine-readable
10 code 10 that either contains the details of the transactions or provides a link to a
20 database accessible from the network that contains the transaction details. The user
can then simply scan the code, and the transaction data are fed directly into an
expense tracking or expense analysis package, billing system, or the like. If the
25 code 10 links the user to the other party's database, then charges can be disputed,
15 or paid by electronic fund transfer, a quotation can be approved, and so on. It will
still usually be necessary to require the user to input some identification, such as
a PIN, but most of the procedural steps involved in accessing such databases online
30 can be bypassed by the code 10 which points directly to the specific supplier, user
account, and records. Of course, depending on the power of the scanner 100 and
20 receiver 180, the user may be linked directly to the required database, or to a portal
server 200 that identifies the correct database and then supplies the necessary
35 further link. Where the portal server 200 hosts a multiplicity of supplier modules,
those modules may include modules that recognize particular sorts of transaction.

40 The transaction records may also include warranty registration and
25 maintenance contract registration details for a newly-purchased product, so that the
user, simply by scanning in a single code 10 applied or attached to the product or
on the associated paperwork, and appending personal details if those are not already
45 stored in the scanner 100, can download the purchase details for accounting
purposes, register for warranty support, register or invite a quotation for a
30 maintenance contract, register for notification of upgrades, or any combination of
those actions.
50

5 According to another embodiment, a business card (not shown) bears a machine-readable code 10 that links to an on-line version of the business card. By scanning the code 10, a user can automatically register with the on-line business
10 card. Then, if any of the contact details on the business card change, registered users can be automatically notified of the change. The owner of the business card
5 may send a change to all registered users, or may select only some users to be notified. The owner may, of course, delete from the database of registered users any
15 who are no longer of interest or whose details are believed no longer to be correct. Such deletions may be carried out either from time to time or in a batch before a
20 change in the business card is broadcast. It is also possible for the owner of the business card to include other services with the registered users of the business card, so that an address change is automatically registered with, for example, the postal service and the Publishers' Clearing House for re-direction of mail.

25 One embodiment of a scanner 100 of the present invention comprises a scanning laser beam, preferably in combination with a device for sensing variations
15 in the intensity of the reflected light, for reading codes 10, typically in the form of black and white markings on a two-dimensional medium. In accordance with the invention, the intensity of the laser beam can be modulated in synchrony with
30 scanning of the beam in two dimensions so as to project a visible image onto a surface. The projection surface may be part of a visor or helmet, or may be a convenient external surface such as a wall. The image may be generated within the
20 scanner 100 from a code 10 that is scanned in, or may be received from a portal server 200.

35 In an embodiment of the invention, a user purchases or leases the use of a number of scan codes 10 from the operator of a portal server 200, or from a
40 provider running a module on a portal server. The user may then use those codes for his or her own purposes, for example, for recording and tracking documents or asset or inventory management. The codes may be totally unique, or may be
45 unique only in combination with the user's "cookie" or other distinguishing data.

50 In one embodiment, the system comprises a preference tracking module (not shown) for tracking actions taken by users of the system. The preference tracking

5 module may be in communication with, or may be incorporated in, any of the scanner 100, the receiver 180, or the portal server 200. The preference tracking
10 module may track one or more of the user input information, the multimedia sequence information corresponding to the user input information, and transactions
5 generated based on the user input information. The preference tracking module may be used to direct a purchase or an information request based on purchasing
15 patterns derived from prior purchases and requests. The system will thus be capable of facilitating transactions with vendors whom a consumer has previously dealt with or indicated a preference for via previous purchasing patterns.

10 In one embodiment, the system comprises a results page module (not shown) in communication with, or incorporated in, any one of the scanner 100, the receiver 180, and the portal server 200. The results page module is capable of
20 arranging the link information and the user input according to the user's preferences or according to the type of information. For example, the link
25 information may correspond to 10 information requests in no particular order comprising 5 requests relating to books, 3 requests relating to wines, and 2 purchase requests for business related publications. The results page module is
30 capable of organizing the requests and the subsequent corresponding multimedia information sequence presentations according to type, e.g. books, wines, publications. The results page module is further capable of organizing the
35 corresponding multimedia information according to the user preferences obtained from the preference tracking module. An embodiment of the system may work with an existing portal site (e.g. Hotmail or Yahoo) which may process the link
40 information from the scanner 100. A customer may open up a queue to a mail message and the portal may process the link information (i.e. scans) and may
25 generate a new mail message via the results page module.

45 In one embodiment of a system for performing a method of the invention, the system enables initiating a communication from a printed medium containing provider information across a network, the system comprising: a scanner for
30 receiving data from the printed medium, the data comprising link information corresponding to the provider information, the scanner comprising a memory: a

5 user interface for receiving user input information, the user input information
capable of being stored in the memory; and a communications bridge in
communication with the network; a receiver in communication with the scanner,
10 the receiver capable of receiving and communicating the link information and the
5 user input information via the network and receiving and playing a multimedia
information sequence; and a portal server in communication with the scanner and
with the receiver via the network, the portal server capable of receiving the link
15 information and the user input information, selecting the multimedia information
sequence corresponding to the link information and the user input information, and
10 transmitting the multimedia information sequence via the network to the receiver.

20 The data may be machine-readable code. The machine-readable code may
be a barcode, an enhanced barcode, a new enhanced code, a dynamic code, and or
a high-density barcode. The machine-readable code may further comprise
25 publication information or personal security information or a provider security
15 information. At least one machine-readable code may be stored in a code file. The
code file may be stored in the scanner memory.

30 The link information may be a universal resource locator, an Internet
address information, a trademark information, a source of origin, an organization
name, a product name, a service name, a benefit redemption information, a provider
20 defined information, a user personal profile information, a user interest information,
35 a server command information, a customer premises equipment preference
information, and an alphanumeric sequence printed in form of a machine-readable
code.

40 The alphanumeric sequence may be assigned by a provider of the provider
25 information. The provider information may be extracted from the alphanumeric
sequence and translated into a network address at the portal server. The system
may also comprise a link table capable of translating the alphanumeric sequence
45 into a network address. The alphanumeric sequence may be one of a UPC or an
ISBN number.

30 The system may further comprise a plurality of link information. The
scanner and receiver may be combined into a single unit. The scanner may be
50

5 further capable of routing the link information and the user input information to the network in response to a user request via the user interface.

10 The communications bridge may be capable of sending the link information and/or the user input information to the receiver or the portal server.

5 The scanner may be a hand-held device. The hand-held device may be wireless. The portal server may be accessible via the network to a network user and/or accessible exclusively by a provider of information. The user input
15 information may comprise one or more of a user personal profile information, or a user interest information. The scanner may be capable of storing a plurality of
10 data. The user input information may be selected from the group consisting of an advertising authorization, a transaction authorization, and a user personal profile
20 information. The scanner may be a remote control, a mouse, a cellular telephone, a pager, a personal digital assistant, or a personal computer.

25 The user interface may be a voice activated system, a keypad, or a keyboard. The communications bridge may be either of an infrared
15 communications system, a mobile radio communications system, or an IP-based communications system. The network may be the Internet, an Intranet, or an
30 Extranet.

20 The scanner may be an enhanced existing electronic device, a TV remote control, a mouse, a cell phone, a pager, a PC card device, a palmtop, a calculator,
35 a key chain, a pen, an identification card, a smart card, a hand held GPS device, a desktop or laptop computer, a digital appliance, or a microprocessor-based device.

40 The portal server may further comprise a tracking module capable of tracking the link information corresponding to the user and a percentage of a fee to
25 be charged to the information provider. The fee may be based on at least one of the selected multimedia information sequence, a number and frequency of the link
45 information received by the portal server corresponding to a particular information provider, or a transaction value when the selected multimedia information sequence
50 generates a transaction.

5 The multimedia information sequence may be advertising or transaction information. The user input information may further comprise a user personal profile information.

10 The portal server may be further capable of tracking a percentage of a fee to be charged to the information provider based on the selected multimedia information sequence and the user personal profile information.

15 The user input information may comprise at least one user interest information. The portal server may further be capable of auctioning the user interest information to an information provider according to a user defined auction criteria in the user personal profile information. The user personal profile information may be stored on the portal server.

20 The portal server may be further capable of tracking a percentage of a fee to be charged to the information provider based on the selected multimedia information sequence and the user interest information. The scanner and the customer premise equipment device may embody a single device. The customer premises equipment may be either of a television, a set top box, a computer, a cell telephone, a remote control, a personal digital assistant, an integrated PC-TV device, or a pager. The multimedia sequence information may be one or more of textual, audio, or video information.

25 The system may further comprise a receiver in communication with the communications bridge. The machine-readable code may change dynamically. The tracking module may be located in either of the scanner, the receiver, or the portal server.

40 In a preferred embodiment, the tracking module is capable of tracking one or more of the link information, the user input information, a percentage of a fee to be paid back to a user of the system and to a manager of the portal server, according to the user personal profile information.

45 The portal server may further comprise a provider management module for controlling the duration and frequency of multimedia sequence information independent of scan generated transactions and for billing the information provider a fee for presenting the multimedia sequence information.

5 The scanner may maintain a clock for synchronizing scan related
information which may be transmitted along with the user input information. Either
of the scanner, the receiver, or the portal server may maintain a provider
10 management module capable of: controlling the multimedia sequence information:
5 tracking the duration and frequency of the displayed multimedia information as part
of the sequence at the receiver, wherein the sequence is in part provided by an
information provider via the network; billing the information provider a fee for
15 displaying the provided multimedia information as part of the sequence; and
tracking a percentage of the fee which will be paid back to an owner of the receiver.

10 The system may further comprise an interactivity feature for selectively
accessing the multimedia sequence information by a user at any time via an
interactivity button of the scanner. The interactivity feature may be capable of
accessing an application as part of the sequence provided by an information
25 provider to maintain a transaction between a user and the information provider.

15 The portal server may be capable of controlling one or more of the
transaction, a number of transactions between the user and the information provider
and a number of interactions between the user and the information provider. The
portal server may be further capable of billing the information provider a fee for
30 maintaining either of the controlled number of transactions or the controlled
number the interactions. The portal server may be further capable of tracking a
20 percentage of the fee which will be paid back to an owner of the scanner. The
transaction may be either of catalog shopping or a purchase.

The link information may include a network address information (e.g. an
40 IP address). The network address information may point to a file containing
25 executable code. Any one or more of the scanner, the receiver, or the portal server
may contain at least one link table. Any one or more of the scanner, the receiver,
or the portal server may contain additional information or downloaded executable
45 code and intelligence that could supplement the code with an interactive response
of the person using the system. The additional information may comprise the
30 person's identifying information, name, address, credit card(s) information, and
related information.

5 The code may further be capable of containing personal information and
reorder information printed by the provider, whereby the personal information is
validated against the user personal profile information before a reorder or another
10 transaction is allowed to proceed. The code may be an information-only type
capable of linking to an information page. The code may be a universal product
5 code (UPC). The code may be routed based on any of the scanned information in
combination with the cookie information, the person's interactive responses from
15 the user input information, the person's location or other demographic information
and the portal server database information. The code may be a reorder code,
10 whereby reordering of a product may be activated by scanning the code,
recognizing it as the reorder code, and maintaining a transaction via the portal
server such that a percentage of a fee for the reorder is maintained by a tracking
20 module. The tracking module may also maintain a percentage of a fee
corresponding to revenue sharing with the person originating the transaction.

25 The code types may include a phone number, a business card, service
information, benefit redemption information, a rebate, a coupon, a literature, or
general information category of interest to a person or information provider. The
30 code may be uploaded to either of the scanner, the receiver, or the portal server
once or alternatively may be sent locally or with cookie and security information
20 from anywhere in the network.

35 The processing of the collected codes may be done at a time different from
reading and scanning the printed medium. The code may be a UPC code, whereby
the user is directed to a provider via the link table without any additional codes.
One or more of the scanner, the receiver, or the portal server may maintain code
40 templates for interactivity, transaction information, authorization information,
references to the publisher, media originator, ad placement, date of publication,
dealer, reseller or distributor. One or more of these elements may further maintain
45 a tracking module working in conjunction with a statistics module collecting the
scanned information on the basis of code types used in scanning the provider
30 information and collecting demographic information relating to the user personal
profile information, link information, and user input information. The tracking
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5 module may be capable of tracking, redirecting, and targeting usage of the codes by different information providers based on the content of the printed information.

10 A person using the system may choose to publish the fact of the scan, thereby allowing a competitor to bid for the right to display to the person more
5 information about the competitor's comparable product or a transaction, based upon the user interest information.

15 The system may be in communication with at least one digital copyright database corresponding to physical published products bearing the code in tangible format, whereby the scan directs a person wanting to copy the published product
10 to the copyright database via the portal server, and the portal server tracks fees based on the copy and is capable of suggesting topically related published products.
20 The portal server may also be capable of monitoring xerographic equipment connected to the network for the processing of the code, which then activates the access to the copyrighted materials database. The code may be an intelligent
25 watermark capable of carrying identifying, distribution, and fee related information on a physical published product.

30 Any one or more of the scanner, the receiver, the portal server, or the provider may be capable of allowing either the information provider or an owner-publisher of printed medium to track scanned printed medium impressions to
20 execution and to collect demographic information according to the user personal profile information. This tracking feature may track the percentage of e-commerce transactions originating from a specific publication, provider, or specific type of
35 publication. The tracking feature may further track the percentage of a fee to be paid back to the owner-publisher of the printed medium based on the number of
40 impressions.

25 The receiver may be a customer premises equipment, a computer, a simple buffer, a direct link, a television, a cell-phone, a pager, a set top box, a PC-TV
45 device, a VCR, a DVD player, an appliance, or any other electronic device.

The portal server may comprise one or multiple sites where the processing
30 of the codes takes place. The portal server may allow central management, assignment, and control of the codes and code types and provider information. The
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portal server may allow advertisers to the portal server, print media owners, and information providers to have a single common database of links for print and electronic transactions. The portal server may maintain a fee tracking module for tracking charges based on an ad or a transaction originating on the network via the portal server. The fee tracking module may also track fees relating to e-commerce transactions originating from the scan.

The portal server may further maintain a provider management module and a statistics module for tracking and maintaining advertising and transactions generated from the providers but originating independent of a scan, based on user personal profile information.

The system may enable the advertisers to broadcast provider information to the portal server users according to the user personal profile information or general portal configuration.

The provider management module may be capable of providing feed-back to the information providers regarding the effectiveness of the provider printed information, and allowing for flexible, real-time message tuning.

The portal server may further maintain an indigraphics module for providing the user personal profile information management functions and for publishing auction-oriented information based on the user personal profile and user interest information. The indigraphics module may operate in conjunction with a bid tracking module collecting the user personal profile information corresponding to bidding users who scanned or expressed interest via the user interest information, whereby the bid tracking module tracks bids placed by bidding users according to published auction information and tracks a percentage of a fee to be paid back to the publisher of the auction information and a media publisher who printed, published, or originated the bid.

The portal server may maintain a code management module allowing the information providers to electronically set and maintain codes, and the corresponding link information.

The code management module may allow the media providers to create and print their own codes and share the code information with the portal server. One

5 or more of the scanner, the receiver, and the portal server in the system may maintain the ability to dynamically change the link or a link table at the portal and to effect a download of a new version of a code or a new set of templates or a new
10 link. The machine-readable code may be a universal product code (UPC) or an ISBN code. The portal server may be capable of selecting the multimedia sequence information based on the link information containing any one or more of a producer name, a distributor name, or a product name, and based on a provider preference
15 link accessible to the provider.

The invention further contemplates a method for communicating
10 multimedia information via a network connecting a scanner, a portal server, and a customer premises equipment, wherein the communication is activated via a printed medium, the method comprising the steps of: scanning a machine-readable code containing a link information corresponding to a provider information from
20 the printed medium using a scanner; storing the machine-readable code in a memory; extracting the link information from the machine readable code in the memory; obtaining and storing a user input information corresponding to the provider information in the memory; sending the link information and the user
25 input information to the portal server via the network; receiving the link information and the user input information at the portal server; selecting a multimedia information sequence corresponding to the link information and the user input information; sending the multimedia information sequence to the
30 receiver via the network; receiving and storing the multimedia information sequence at the receiver; and playing the multimedia information sequence via the receiver.

25 In an embodiment, the invention comprises a method for communicating multimedia information via a network, wherein the communication is activated via a printed medium, a system for performing the method comprising: a scanner for
45 machine-readable code containing a link information corresponding to a provider information depicted on the printed medium, the scanner being connected to the network, the scanner containing a memory; a user interface for obtaining user input
30 information capable of being stored in the memory, the user input information

5 corresponding to the provider information; a communications bridge for sending
the link information and the user input information via the network; a portal server
10 in communication with the scanner via the network, the portal server capable of
receiving the link information and the user input information; selecting a
5 multimedia information sequence corresponding to the link information and the
user input information; and sending the multimedia information sequence via the
15 network; and a customer premises equipment in communication with the portal
server, the customer premises equipment capable of receiving the multimedia
information sequence and playing the multimedia information sequence.

10 In another embodiment, the invention comprises a method for
communicating multimedia information via a network, wherein the communication
is activated via a printed medium, a system for performing the method comprising:
20 a user device capable of connecting to the network, the user device containing a
scanner and a storage device for machine-readable code containing a link
25 information corresponding to a provider information depicted on the printed
medium; a user interface for obtaining user input information capable of being
stored in the storage device, the user input information corresponding to the
30 provider information; a communications bridge for sending the link information
and the user input information via the network; a display device for receiving
20 multimedia information sequence and playing the multimedia information
sequence; and a portal server in communication with the user device via the
35 network, the portal server capable of receiving the link information and the user
input information, selecting a multimedia information sequence corresponding to
the link information and the user input information, and sending the multimedia
40 information sequence via the network.

25 In yet another embodiment, the invention comprises a method for
communicating multimedia information via a network, wherein the communication
45 is activated via a tangible medium, a system for performing the method comprising:
a user device capable of connecting to the network, the user device containing a
30 transducer and a storage device for machine-readable code containing a link
information corresponding to a provider information depicted on the printed
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5 medium; a user interface for obtaining user input information capable of being
stored in the storage device, the user input information corresponding to the
10 provider information; a communications bridge for sending the link information
and the user input information via the network; a display device for receiving
5 multimedia information sequence and playing the multimedia information
sequence; and a portal server in communication with the user device via the
15 network, the portal server capable of receiving the link information and the user
input information, selecting a multimedia information sequence corresponding to
the link information and the user input information, and sending the multimedia
20 information sequence via the network.

20 In this embodiment of the system, the user device may be either of a
proximity-based device capable of activating a smart button or a contact-based
device.

25 In another embodiment, the invention comprises a method for managing
15 a domain name service based on initiating a communication from an object
containing provider information via a network, such as the Internet, an intranet, or
an extranet, which connects a scanner, a portal server, and a receiver. The method
30 involves scanning a machine-readable code containing a link information
corresponding to the provider information from the object using the scanner and
20 storing the machine-readable code in a memory. The link information is then
35 extracted from the machine readable code in the memory. A user input information
corresponding to the provider information is also obtained and stored in the
memory. The link information and the user input information are then sent to the
40 portal server via the network. The portal server receives the link information and
25 user input information and selects a multimedia information sequence
corresponding to the link information and the user input information. The
45 multimedia information sequence is then sent to the receiver via the network. The
receiver receives and stores the multimedia information sequence plays the
sequence automatically or in response to a stimulus, such as a user request.

30 In one embodiment of a system executing a method of the invention, the
scanner and the receiver comprises a single device. In another embodiment, the

5 scanner communicates with the portal server directly, and customer premises
equipment ("CPE"), serving as the receiver, plays multimedia sequence information
10 received from the portal server. In a further embodiment, the CPE operates as both
a scanner and a receiver. The multimedia sequence information may be advertising
5 or transaction information and may contain one or more of textual, audio, or video
information.

15 In a preferred embodiment of a system executing a method of the invention,
the scanner includes a memory, a user interface, and a communications bridge. The
scanner may be, for example, a remote control, a mouse, a cellular telephone, a
10 personal digital assistant, a personal computer, a pager, or a two-way pager. The
scanner detects and reads data, such as machine-readable codes containing link
20 information corresponding to provider information from the printed medium. A
plurality of codes may be stored in the scanner, the receiver, and the portal server.
The link information corresponding to the provider information may include, for
25 example, a universal resource locator, an Internet address information, trademark
information, a source of origin, an organization name, a product name, a service
name, benefit redemption information, provider defined information, user personal
30 profile information, user interest information, server command information, and
customer premises equipment preference information.

20 The user interface obtains user input information, such as an advertising
authorization, a transaction authorization, user personal profile information, and
35 user interest information corresponding to the provider information. The user input
information may be received and stored by either the scanner, the receiver, or the
portal server. The scanner routes the link information and the user input
40 information based upon a user request via the user interface. The user interface
25 may be, for example, a voice-activated system, a keypad, or a keyboard. In one
embodiment of a system executing a method of the invention, the user interface
45 may reside on any one or more of the scanner, the receiver, such as customer
premises equipment for displaying the multimedia sequence information, or the
30 portal server.

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5 The communications bridge sends the link information and the user input
information to the receiver and, via the network, to the portal server. An infrared
communications system, a mobile radio communications system, or an IP-based
10 communications system are exemplary of the communications bridge.

5 The portal server is in communication with the scanner or the receiver via
the network. In one embodiment of a system executing a method of the invention,
15 the portal server is accessible via the Internet to any Internet user. In another
embodiment, the portal server is accessible only by the provider of information.
The portal server is capable of receiving the link information and the user input
10 information, selecting a multimedia information sequence corresponding to the link
information and the user input information, and sending the multimedia
20 information sequence via the network to the receiver. The portal server is further
capable of tracking link information corresponding to a user, including a universal
resource locator, Internet address information, a trademark information, a source
25 of origin, an organization name, a product name, a service name, a benefit
redemption information, a provider defined information, a user personal profile
15 information, a user interest information, a server command information, and a
customer premises equipment preference information.

 In a preferred embodiment of a system executing a method of the invention,
20 the portal server is further capable of tracking a percentage of a fee to be charged
35 to the information provider based on, for example, the selected multimedia
information sequence, the number and frequency of the link information received
by the portal server corresponding to a particular information provider, or the
40 transaction value in the event the selected multimedia information sequence
25 generates a transaction.

 In another embodiment of a system executing a method of the invention, the
portal server is further capable of tracking a percentage of a fee to be charged to the
45 information provider based on, for example, the selected multimedia information
sequence and either of the user personal profile information or the user interest
30 information. The portal server is further capable of auctioning the user interest
50 information according to a user defined auction criteria in the user personal profile

5 information to an information provider. The user personal profile information may be stored on the portal server.

10 The receiver is in communication with the scanner and the portal server, and is capable of receiving the link and user input information, receiving a multimedia
5 information sequence, and playing the multimedia information sequence. The receiver may be a CPE, such as a television, a set top box, a computer, a cell telephone, a remote control, a personal digital assistant, an integrated PC-TV
15 device (e.g. Web TV) or a pager.

A system executing a method of the invention may further comprise a code
10 tracking module for tracking ranges of unique codes which can (but do not necessarily have to include) one or more of embedded template calls for interactivity, references to the publisher, media originator, ad placement, date of
20 publication, dealer, and other provider information. A method of the invention may include one or more of the steps of tracking licensing fees corresponding to
25 licensing the codes to third parties, tracking the advertising used in connection with the codes, and collecting the demographics or indigraphics (i.e. individual demographics) corresponding to the use of the codes. A method may also include
30 tracking a licensing fee for use of the link table information. By way of example, a system executing a method of the invention may be capable of tracking the fact
20 of a person scanning the back of a manufacturer's notebook computer, and either maintaining the multimedia request for information with or for the manufacturer,
35 or auctioning that information to a third party, such as a competitor.

The portal server may comprise a code tracking module for tracking at least
40 one of the data, a link table entry, embedded template calls for interactivity, references to a publisher, a media originator, an ad placement, a date of publication,
25 a dealer, or other provider information, licensing fees corresponding to licensing at least one of the data, a link table entry or a machine readable code to third
45 parties, advertising used in connection with the codes, and demographics or indigraphics corresponding to the use of the codes.

30 The code tracking module may further be capable of tracking commercial transactions involving leasing the link table(s) associated with the code. A method
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5 of the invention may include automatically notifying a manufacturer of an object bearing the code of the scan. A method of the invention may also include tracking and aggregating all scanned information (i.e. the codes.)

10 Any one of the scanner, the receiver, or the portal server may be capable of supporting downloadable applets and/or templates to provide additional functionality and interactivity. These elements could also support Java applets or work with Jini enabled devices. That is, the system can use and extend the Jini technology.

15 A method of the invention includes the steps of receiving the code in alphanumeric format (e.g. a combination of numbers and letters printed in conjunction with the machine-readable code) at the user interface and presenting the resulting or corresponding multimedia sequence.

20 A preferred method of the invention uses the system as described as an alternative method for managing the present DNS schema. Thus, the typical alphanumeric sequence (i.e. CLIC-THRU.COM) may be supplemented or substituted with machine-readable code, which may contain any digital information such as executable code, the templates, or other digital content such as video, audio, or text data. The code may be transparent or non-transparent. In one embodiment of a system executing a method of the invention, the code may link through a URL which then links to an IP address. In another embodiment, the code may link to an IP address which in turn links to a URL.

25 Under this schema, a method of the invention includes charging companies for signing up for the alternate DNS and tracking their use of the system. The method may also include linking to the ordinary DNS sites. When the system is deployed under the subject invention, the link tables aggregated across the system for resolving the multimedia content locations establish the alternate DNS.

30 A preferred method of the invention includes the step of tracking the purchasers based on transaction size and frequency and matching the size and frequency to a scanner device such that the device cost is subsidized based on the size and frequency of the transaction.

5 In an embodiment, a system executing a method of the invention includes
a credit card module for working in conjunction with a credit card company. The
credit card module is capable of tracking transactions and corresponding referrals.
10 It is further capable of online access to credit limits for transactions including
shopping. Its tracking capabilities may include tracking the size and frequency of
5 purchases and corresponding purchasers. The credit card module may be further
capable of two-way communication such as obtaining credit and balance
15 information and maintaining transactions and other similar functionality. The
system may further contain an affinity information tracking module whereby the
10 module maintains benefit redemption, frequent flyer, or similar affinity
20 information.

In an embodiment, a system executing a method of the invention is further
capable of use in conjunction with directory listings, such as the yellow pages,
25 whereby the printed medium is, for example, the yellow pages book.

15 In an embodiment, a method of the invention includes the step of tracking
fees corresponding to transactions initiated via a scan whereby everyone along the
consumption and distribution food chains gets paid a percentage of the transaction.
30 The food chain may include portal providers, hardware manufacturers with
imbedded scanning technology of the present invention, bandwidth carriers (e.g.
20 telephone, cable, and satellite), media companies, ad firms, persons placing the ad,
35 stores where the transaction was initiated, information providers, and any other
parties facilitating the transactions. The store may be a virtual store whereby the
store owner only leases one or more link table entry, and links to an ordinary
distributor for the balance of the transaction.

40 25 In another embodiment, a method of the invention includes the step of
tracking one or more of the purchasers or e-commerce transactions based on the
transaction size and frequency, and matching the size and frequency to a second
45 product or service device such that a cost of the second product or service is
subsidized based on the size and frequency of the transaction initiated via a scan.
30 By way of example, a long distance phone company may be able to bolster its long
distance offerings by selling value based services, as can ISP's, and paging

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companies. By way of another example, a company could offer free or subsidized services (e.g. Internet access) based on a percentage of e-commerce transactions, the ability to sell them as a combined market, or the ability to do targeted and micro-segmented advertising.

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5 The data may comprises a machine-readable code containing any digital information including executable code, templates, or other digital content comprising a video, audio, or text data.

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 The present invention may be embodied in other specific forms without departing from the spirit or essential attributes thereof and, accordingly, reference 10 should be made to the appended claims, rather than to the foregoing specification, as indicating the scope of the invention.

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Claims

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CLAIMS

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1. A method of distributing vendibles using a network connecting a scanner, a portal server, and a receiver, the method comprising the steps of:

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providing an object containing at least human-readable information and machine-readable codes identifying vendibles;

scanning one of said machine-readable codes containing information identifying a desired vendible using the scanner;

20

storing the machine-readable code in a memory;

optionally obtaining and storing in the memory a user input information further identifying the desired vendible;

25

sending the stored information and information identifying the user to the portal server via the network;

receiving the said information at the portal server;

selecting a supplier of said desired vendible; and

30

sending to at least one of said user and said selected supplier information identifying the other of said user and said selected supplier.

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2. A method of distributing vendibles according to claim 1, further comprising the step of supplying said vendibles at a location indicated by said information identifying the user.

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3. A method of distributing vendibles according to claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

sending from the portal server to the receiver information identifying a location of said supplier; and

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providing said vendibles to said user at said location of said supplier.

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4. A method of distributing vendibles according to claim 1.
further comprising the steps of:

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identifying a plurality of said suppliers;
procuring information from said suppliers with respect to vendibles
supplied by each of said plurality of suppliers; and
selecting one from said plurality of suppliers.

15

5. A method of distributing vendibles according to claim 1.
wherein said scanner determines the current location of said scanner:

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wherein the said information identifying the user comprises
information identifying the determined location of said scanner; and
wherein said step of selecting a supplier includes selecting a supplier
convenient to the identified location of said scanner.

25

6. A method of distributing vendibles according to claim 5.
wherein said scanner comprises a receiver for broadcast signals indicative of the
location of said scanner.

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7. A method of distributing vendibles according to claim 6.
wherein said receiver for broadcast signals is a Global Positioning System receiver.

35

8. A method of distributing vendibles according to claim 1.
wherein the suppliers are mobile, further comprising the step of determining the
current locations of possible suppliers, and wherein the step of selecting a supplier
comprises comparing the current locations of possible suppliers and the user.

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9. A method of distributing vendibles according to claim 1.
wherein the step of selecting a supplier comprises auctioning the information
received at the portal server among at least two possible suppliers.

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10. A method of distributing vendibles according to claim 1, which comprises:

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running on the portal server a plurality of supplier processes, all supporting a standard interface:

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receiving the said information at the portal server in standard form: identifying a supplier or suppliers pertinent to the vendible in question; and

transferring the said information to at least one supplier process pertinent to the vendible in question.

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11. A method of distributing vendibles according to claim 1, which comprises tracking at the portal server a part of the transaction value payable to the supplier.

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12. A method of distributing vendibles according to claim 1, wherein the object is a vendible, wherein the machine-readable code identifies that vendible, and which comprises supplying to the user a repeat order of the same vendible.

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13. A method of communicating news information via a network connecting a scanner, a portal server, and a receiver, the method comprising the steps of:

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providing a printed medium containing information including human-readable news information and a machine-readable code containing a link information related to the human-readable news information:

scanning the machine-readable code from the printed medium using the scanner;

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storing the machine-readable code in a memory; extracting the link information from the machine readable code in the memory;

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optionally obtaining and storing user input information in the memory:

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sending the link information and the user input information to the portal server via the network:

receiving the link information and the user input information at the portal server:

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selecting by the portal server a multimedia news information sequence corresponding to the link information and the user input information;

sending the multimedia information sequence to the receiver via the network;

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receiving and storing the multimedia information sequence at the receiver; and

playing the multimedia information sequence via the receiver.

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14. A method of communicating news information according to claim 13, further comprising the steps of:

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storing the link information and the user input information at the portal server:

identifying newly-available multimedia news information:

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selecting a newly-available multimedia news information sequence relevant to the stored news information and user input information;

sending the newly-available multimedia information sequence to the receiver via the network:

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receiving and storing the multimedia information sequence at the receiver; and

playing the multimedia information sequence via the receiver.

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15. A system for communicating information via a telecommunications network by initiating a communication from an object containing scannable provider information, the system comprising:

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telecommunications apparatus including a scanner comprising a

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5 memory, the scanner receiving data by scanning from said object and storing said data in said memory, the data comprising link information corresponding to the provider information.

10 a user interface for receiving user input information, the user input information capable of being stored in the memory;

15 the telecommunications apparatus being connected to the network for communicating the link information and the user input information via the network and receiving information via the network; and

20 a portal server in communication with the telecommunications apparatus via the network, the portal server receiving the link information and the user input information, selecting an information sequence corresponding to the link information and the user input information, and causing the information sequence to be transmitted via the network to the telecommunications apparatus.

25 16. A system for communicating information according to claim 15, wherein the said telecommunications apparatus comprises a telephone, and wherein the portal server transmits information to the telephone in the form of synthesized speech.

30 17. A system for communicating information according to claim 16, wherein the portal server communicates with a user by means of synthesized speech replayed by the telephone to the user and user input entered on a keypad of the telephone.

40 18. A system for communicating information according to claim 15, wherein the scanner scans information from a printed medium.

45 19. A system for communicating information according to claim 15, wherein the said telecommunications apparatus is a pager which displays text, and wherein the portal server transmits information in the form of text to be displayed on such a pager.

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20. A system for communicating information according to claim 15, wherein the telecommunications apparatus includes a facsimile machine for receiving information from the telecommunications network, and the portal server sends facsimile messages that include codes readable by the said scanner.

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21. A method of commercial administration using a network connecting a scanner, a portal server, and a receiver, the method comprising the steps of:

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generating a written record of a transaction, which record includes machine-readable code identifying at least the transaction and a database containing records of the transaction and accessible from the network via the portal server:

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scanning said machine-readable code using the scanner;

storing the machine-readable code in a memory;

optionally obtaining and storing a user input information;

sending the stored information and information identifying the user to the portal server via the network;

30

receiving the said information at the portal server; and

accessing the records of the transaction in the said database.

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22. A method of commercial administration according to claim 21, which comprises downloading from the database to the receiver the records of the transaction.

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23. A method of commercial administration according to claim 21, wherein the written record is a receipt, and which comprises importing the downloaded records into an expense accounting system.

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24. A method of commercial administration according to claim 21, which comprises automatically transferring funds to pay a debt created by the transaction.

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25. A method of commercial administration according to claim
21, which comprises appending information identifying the user to the database.

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26. A method of commercial administration according to claim
25, wherein the transaction is a sale, and the database contains product and
purchaser information.

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27. A method of commercial administration according to claim
25, which comprises using the product and purchaser information for warranty
administration.

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28. A method of commercial administration according to claim
25, which comprises using the product and purchaser information for maintenance
contract administration.

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29. A method of commercial administration according to claim
25, which comprises using the product and purchaser information for the supply of
upgrades.

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30. A method of contact administration using a network
connecting a scanner, a portal server, and a receiver, the method comprising the
steps of:

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distributing business cards that identify and provide contact details
for a person and include machine-readable code at least identifying the said person;
scanning said machine-readable code using the scanner;
storing the machine-readable code in a memory;
sending the stored information and information identifying a user
to the portal server via the network;
receiving the said information at the portal server;
storing in a database associated with the said person at least the

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5 information identifying the said user; and
notifying at least some users identified in the said database of
10 changes in the contact details of the said person.

31. A method of contact administration according to claim 30,
comprising automatically notifying all users identified in the said database of
15 changes in the contact details of the said person.

32. A method of contact administration according to claim 31,
comprising the repeated step of deleting users from the database.

33. A method of contact administration according to claim 30,
comprising the step of reviewing the users identified in the database when a change
25 in the contact details of the said person occurs, and notifying only some said users
of the change.

34. Apparatus for selection of entertainment programs,
30 comprising:

a printed medium containing entries giving human-readable
information on respective available entertainment programs, and each including a
35 machine-readable code;

a scanner for scanning the machine readable codes;

a portal server connected to said scanner via a network; and

40 a receiver connected to said portal server via said network;

said scanner being capable of transmitting said scanned code to said
portal server; and

said portal server being responsive to said transmitted scan to
45 transmit said entertainment program to said receiver.

35. Apparatus according to claim 34, wherein said portal server
50 causes said user to be charged for viewing said program.

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36. Apparatus for selection of entertainment programs.
comprising:

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a printed medium containing entries giving human-readable
information on respective available entertainment programs, and each including a
machine-readable code;

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a scanner for scanning the machine readable codes;

a portal server connected to said scanner via a network; and

a receiver connected to said portal server via said network;

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said scanner being capable of transmitting said scanned code to said
portal server; and

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said portal server being responsive to said transmitted scan to
transmit to said receiver information enabling said receiver to show said
entertainment program to a user.

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37. Apparatus according to claim 36, wherein said machine-
readable code includes data identifying a time and channel for a television program,
and said responsive apparatus comprises a video recorder.

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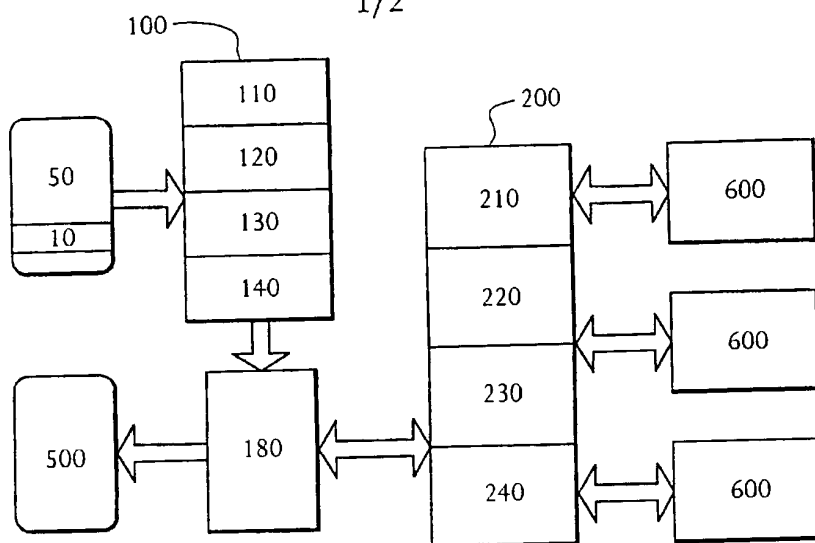


FIG. 1

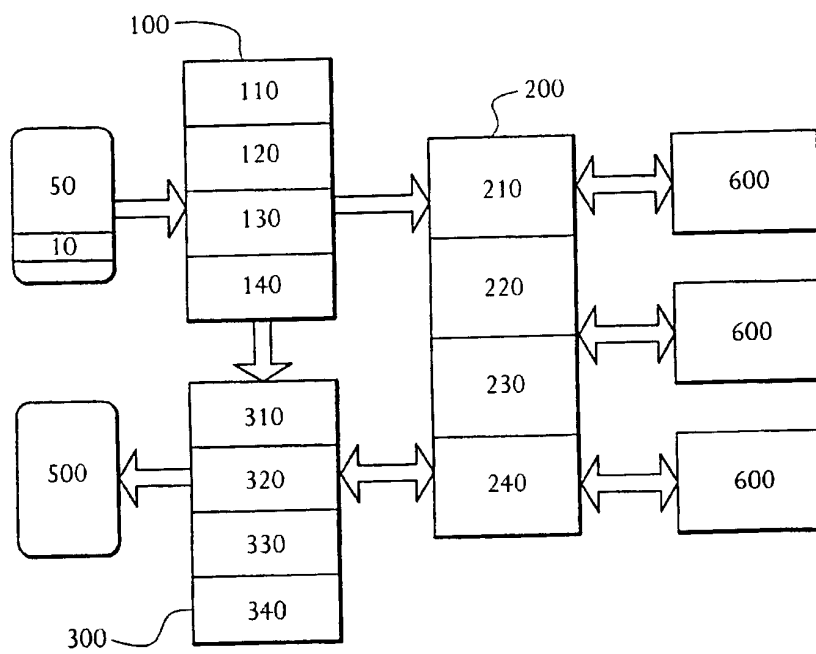


FIG. 2

2/2

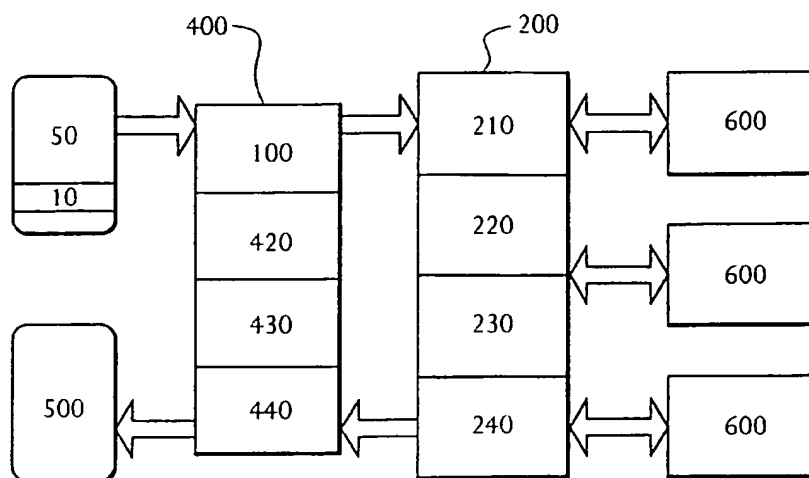


FIG. 3

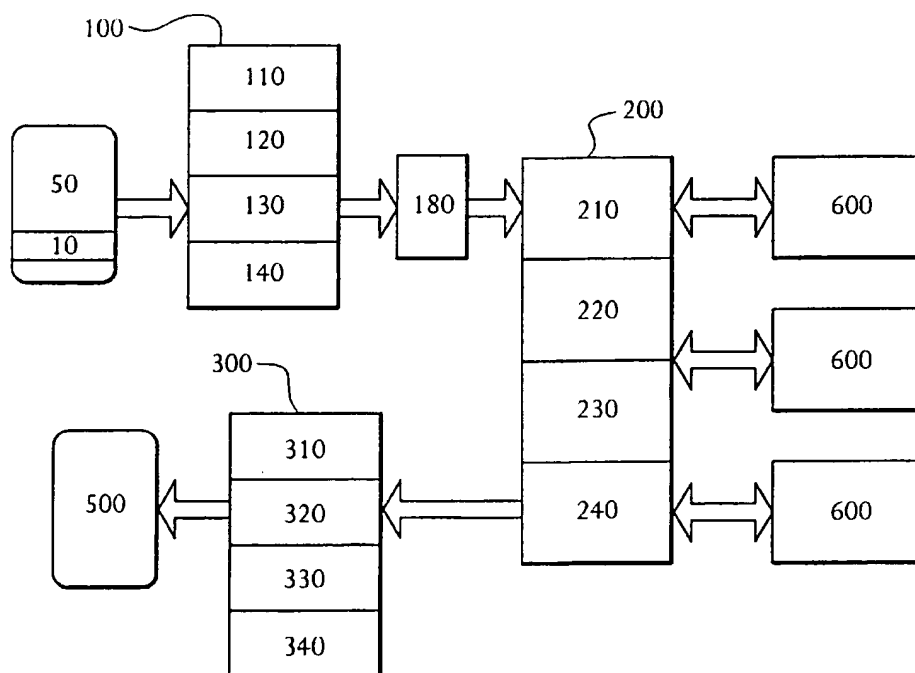


FIG. 4

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/US00/09612

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC(7) : G06F 17/60
US CL : 705/21, 23, 26, 27
According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
U.S. : 705/21, 23, 26, 27

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)
Please See Extra Sheet.

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
Y	WO 97/01137 A1 (HUDETZ et al.) 09 January 1997, Figures 1, 2, 6, and 8; pages 5-16, and 18-20.	1-12
Y	US 5,694,551 A (DOYLE et al.) 02 December 1997, Abstract, column 3, lines 24-40, column 4, lines 46-55.	1, 2, 11
Y	US 5,890,136 A (KIPP) 30 March 1999, Abstract	3
Y	MAJER, A. et al., NewMedia, Vol. 9, No. 1, page 11, January 1999.	4, 5, 9
Y	US 4,797,818 A (COTTER) 10 January 1989, column 2, lines 14-57, column 3, lines 11-18 and 33-36.	5, 10

☒ Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C. ☐ See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents	* P* later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention
* A* document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance	* N* document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone
* E* earlier document published on or after the international filing date	* Y* document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art
* L* document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)	* X* document member of the same patent family
* (1)* document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means	
* P* document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed	

Date of the actual completion of the international search

07 JULY 2000

Date of mailing of the international search report

14 AUG 2000

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/US00/09612

C (Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
Y	US 5,444,444 A (ROSS) 22 August 1995, column 7, lines 4-14.	6, 7
Y	US 5,122,959 A (NATHANSON et al.) 16 June 1992, column 1, line 12, through column 2, line 47; column 4, lines 1-7.	8
Y	US 5,583,487 A (ACKERMAN et al.) 10 December 1996; column 2, lines 2-4.	12
A	US 5,825,002 A (ROSLAK) 20 October 1998.	1-12
A,P	US 5,979,757 A (TRACY et al.) 09 November 1999.	1-12

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/US00/09612

Box I Observations where certain claims were found unsearchable (Continuation of item 1 of first sheet)

This international report has not been established in respect of certain claims under Article 17(2)(a) for the following reasons:

1. ☐ Claims Nos.:
because they relate to subject matter not required to be searched by this Authority, namely:

2. ☐ Claims Nos.:
because they relate to parts of the international application that do not comply with the prescribed requirements to such an extent that no meaningful international search can be carried out, specifically:

3. ☐ Claims Nos.:
because they are dependent claims and are not drafted in accordance with the second and third sentences of Rule 6.4(a).

Box II Observations where unity of invention is lacking (Continuation of item 2 of first sheet)

This International Searching Authority found multiple inventions in this international application, as follows:

1. ☐ As all required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant, this international search report covers all searchable claims.
2. ☐ As all searchable claims could be searched without effort justifying an additional fee, this Authority did not invite payment of any additional fee.
3. ☐ As only some of the required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant, this international search report covers only those claims for which fees were paid, specifically claims Nos.:

4. ☒ No required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant. Consequently, this international search report is restricted to the invention first mentioned in the claims; it is covered by claims Nos.:
1-12

Remark on Protest

- ☐ The additional search fees were accompanied by the applicant's protest.
☐ No protest accompanied the payment of additional search fees.

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/US00/09612

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Electronic data bases consulted (Name of data base and where practicable terms used):

WEST search of U.S., European, and Japanese patents, Derwent patent abstracts, and IBM technical disclosures. DIALOG searches of databases 2, 9, 13, 15, 16, 20, 35, 65, 77, 99, 148, 160, 233, 256, 275, 278, 473, 344, 347, 351, 348, 349, 474, 475, 545, 553, 570, 583, 610, 621, 623, 624, 634, 636, 637, 649, 810, and 813.

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